

Scripture Study

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B



Opening prayer

1 Kings 19:4-8

(Ps 34:2-9)

Ephesians 4:30—5:2

John 6:41-51

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday we return to the setting of the Gospel reading for the last two Sundays—the synagogue at Capernaum. The Passover is near and it is exactly a year before another Passover—Good Friday.
- We've seen Jesus slowly unfolding his teaching about who he is to his listeners through the multiplication of the loaves and the invitation to trust in him. Up until now, they thought they knew him as the carpenter's son from Nazareth, an obscure village only 20 miles away from Capernaum. At his statement that he is "the bread of life...come down from heaven" (John 6:35, 38), they "murmur" against him, much as the Israelites murmured against Moses and God during their forty-year sojourn in the wilderness (verses 41 and 43; Exodus 16, Numbers 11:1).
- Jesus' listeners become increasingly argumentative—but still attentive—as he begins to reveal to them something about the truth of his divine nature (verses 41-47). Starting at verse 48 of this week's reading, however, and into next Sunday's Gospel, Jesus' teaching is about to take a radical turn. He begins to teach them about the Eucharist—his own Body and Blood that he will give them to eat.

Questions:

- In verses 41-42, how do Jesus' listeners respond to his claims? Do they know as much about him as they think they do? If you had been Jesus' neighbor and heard his words, would you have recognized him for who he is—God in the flesh?
- What part is played by God and by the people in the process of their coming to know Jesus (verses 44-45)? Is coming to know the Lord all up to God or all up to us—or both?
- How is the bread that Jesus gives greater than that of Moses (verses 32 and 49)?
- In verse 50, what does Jesus mean when he says that the man who eats "the living bread which came down from heaven" will not die (John 11:21-27; CCC 1052)?
- "Murmuring" of the type mentioned in this Sunday's Gospel is often equated with the stubbornness and ingratitude to God displayed by the Israelites wandering in the wilderness (Exodus 16, Numbers 11:1, Isaiah 29:24). Do you find yourself habitually "murmuring" against God? If so, why? What would be a better response?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1428, 151, 1355, 1406, 2837

Closing prayer

Whereas in the Lord's Prayer, we are bidden to ask for 'our daily bread,' the Holy Fathers of the Church all but unanimously teach that by these words must be understood, not so much that material bread which is the support of the body, as of the Eucharistic bread, which ought to be our daily food.

–Pope St. Pius X

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!

"If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever"

Scripture: John 6:44-51

The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Meditation: God offers his people abundant life, but we can miss it. What is the *bread of life* which Jesus offers? It is first of all the life of God himself – life which sustains us not only now in this age but also in the age to come. The Rabbis said that *the generation in the wilderness have no part in the life to come*. In the Book of Numbers it is recorded that the people who refused to brave the dangers of the promised



land were condemned to wander in the wilderness until they died. The Rabbis believed that the father who missed the promised land also missed the life to come. God sustained the Israelites in the wilderness with manna from heaven. This bread foreshadowed the true heavenly bread which Jesus would offer his followers.

Jesus makes a claim only God can make: He is the *true bread of heaven* that can satisfy the deepest hunger we experience. The manna from heaven prefigured the superabundance of the unique bread of the Eucharist or Lord's Supper which Jesus gave to his disciples on the eve of his sacrifice. The manna in the wilderness sustained the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land. It could not produce eternal life for the Israelites. The bread which Jesus offers his disciples sustains us not only on our journey to the heavenly paradise, it gives us the abundant supernatural life of God which sustains us for all eternity. When we receive from the Lord's table we unite ourselves to Jesus Christ, who makes us sharers in his body and blood and partakers of his divine life. Ignatius of Antioch (35-107 A.D.) calls it the "one bread that provides

the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death, and the food that makes us live for ever in Jesus Christ" (*Ad Eph.* 20,2). This supernatural food is healing for both body and soul and strength for our journey heavenward.

Jesus offers us the abundant supernatural life of heaven itself – but we can miss it or even refuse it. To refuse Jesus is to refuse eternal life, unending life with the Heavenly Father. To accept Jesus as the *bread of heaven* is not only life and spiritual nourishment for this world but glory in the world to come. When you approach the Table of the Lord, what do you expect to receive? Healing, pardon, comfort, and rest for your soul? The Lord has much more for us, more than we can ask or imagine. The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist or Lord's Supper is an intimate union with Christ. As bodily nourishment restores lost strength, so the Eucharist strengthens us in charity and enables us to break with disordered attachments to creatures and to be more firmly rooted in the love of Christ. Do you hunger for the "bread of life"?

"Lord Jesus, you are the living bread which sustains me in this life. May I always hunger for the bread which comes from heaven and find in it the nourishment and strength I need to love and serve you wholeheartedly. May I always live in the joy, peace, and unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, both now and in the age to come."

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